
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

NEW STRONGSTART CENTRE HELPS PRINCE RUPERT FAMILIES

PRINCE RUPERT – The Conrad elementary StrongStart early learning centre was officially opened today to help Prince Rupert preschool children develop reading skills and get ready for kindergarten.

“Nearly one out of four B.C. kindergarten students is not developmentally ready to start school, and so we’re taking steps to address that,” said Education Minister Shirley Bond. “The StrongStart early learning centre at Conrad elementary school is part of our government’s literacy action plan, and will help give youngsters in the area the best possible start in school and in life.”

The centre takes advantage of underutilized space in Conrad elementary school. Many schools across B.C. have excess space as a result of declining enrolment. Since 2001, enrolment has decreased by 42,500 students provincially. Like the School Community Connections program that provides community access to existing underutilized school space, StrongStart centres turn the challenge of declining enrolment into an opportunity.

“I am pleased to join in officially opening our StrongStart program here in Conrad elementary school,” said Prince Rupert school board chair Tina Last. “Thanks to the commitment of the Province to early learning, preschoolers in School District No. 52 have the opportunity to become better prepared for their entry into kindergarten and to embrace their school experience.”

The StrongStart centre offers a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. A qualified early childhood educator will lead activities, including stories, music and art, to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like environment.

The Conrad StrongStart centre was awarded \$50,000 to prepare its in-school space and fund its first year of operating costs, including staff and supplies and healthy snacks. The centre will receive another \$30,000 for its second year of operation.

The StrongStart centre in Conrad elementary school is part of the first phase of the StrongStart centre program, which includes 16 sites and a government investment of over \$1.4 million. In January, Premier Gordon Campbell unveiled the \$27-million first phase of ReadNow BC, government’s new literacy plan, which promised more StrongStart centres around the province and increased government’s investment to \$5 million. StrongStart centres fulfil a 2005 election promise and a throne speech commitment to use underutilized school spaces as centres to deliver early learning services.

The Province is committed to reaching its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Since 2001, government has invested over \$106 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs such as \$9.5 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn and \$2.7-million for the ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) program that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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